

THE SITUATION OF THE JEW

Reflections on the Jewish Question—I

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

THE Jews have one friend, the democrat. But he is a feeble protector. No doubt he proclaims that all men have equal rights; no doubt he has founded the League for the Rights of Man; but his own declarations show the weakness of his position. In the 18th century, once and for all, he made his choice: the analytic spirit. He has no eyes for the concrete syntheses with which history confronts him.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S book *Réflexions sur la Question Juive*, published in Paris in 1946, has already come to be regarded by those who have read it in French as one of the most profound modern statements on the Jewish problem—a problem which Sartre sees as of central importance to modern culture and civilization. The first portion of this book was translated and published in this country under the title "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" (Partisan Review Series, No. 1). In it M. Sartre analyzed the psychology of the anti-Semite, seeking to make clear what unconscious drives lead the anti-Semite to project his own hostilities and frustrations upon that mythical figure which he labels The Jew. The book, following this, offers a close analysis of the situation of the Jew in Western culture, of the effect of that situation upon the lives and characters of those who must live in it, and of the responsibility of society in general to seek an adequate solution to the problem. This analysis, to which about three-quarters of the whole text of the book is devoted, will appear in COMMENTARY as a series of articles, of which this is the first. Jean-Paul Sartre, novelist, dramatist, and critic, is the leader of the existentialist movement in modern French literature, and has since the war gained an international reputation as the most distinguished and most productive representative of the new generation of French writers. Of his numerous books, those which have so far appeared in translation in this country include: *No Exit*, *The Flies*, *The Age of Reason*, and *The Reprieve*, all published in 1947. M. Sartre was born in Paris in 1905 and is the founder and editor of *Les Temps Modernes*. This article is translated from the French by George J. Becker.

He recognizes neither Jew, nor Arab, nor Negro, nor bourgeois, nor worker, but only man—man always the same in all times and all places. He resolves all collectivities into individual elements. To him a physical body is a collection of molecules; a social body, a collection of individuals. And by individual he means the incarnation in a single example of the universal traits which make up human nature.

Thus the anti-Semite and the democrat tirelessly carry on their dialogue without ever understanding one another or realizing that they are not talking about the same things. If the anti-Semite reproaches the Jew for his avarice, the democrat will reply that he knows Jews who are not avaricious and Christians who are. But the anti-Semite is not moved. What he meant was that there is a "Jewish" avarice, an avarice determined by that synthetic whole, the Jewish person. He can agree without embarrassment that it is possible for certain Christians to be avaricious, for to him Christian avarice and Jewish avarice are not the same. To the democrat, on the contrary, avarice has a certain universal and invariable nature that can be added to the ensemble of the traits which make up an individual and still remain the same under all circumstances. There are not two ways of being avaricious: one is or one is not.

The democrat, like the scientist, fails to see the particular case; to him the individual is only an ensemble of universal traits. It follows that his defense of the Jew saves the latter as man and annihilates him as Jew. In contrast to the anti-Semite, the democrat is not afraid of himself; what he fears is the great collective forms in which he is in danger of being disintegrated. Thus he has chosen to throw in his lot with the analytic spirit because it does not see these synthetic realities. Taking this point of view, he fears the awakening of a "Jewish consciousness" in the Jew; that is, he fears

that the Jew will acquire a consciousness of the Jewish collectivity—just as he fears that a “class consciousness” may awaken in the worker. His defense is to persuade individuals that they exist in an isolated state. “There are no Jews,” he says, “there is no Jewish question.” This means that he wants to separate the Jew from his religion, from his family, from his ethnic community, in order to plunge him into the democratic crucible whence he will emerge naked and alone, an individual and solitary particle like all the other particles.

This is what, in the United States, is called the policy of assimilation; immigration laws have registered the failure of this policy and, on the whole, the failure of the democratic point of view. How could it be otherwise? For a Jew, conscious and proud of being Jewish, asserting his claim to be a member of the Jewish community without ignoring on that account the bonds which unite him to the national community, there may not be so much difference between the anti-Semite and the democrat. The former wishes to destroy him as a man and leave nothing in him but the Jew, the pariah, the untouchable; the latter wishes to destroy him as a Jew and leave nothing in him but the man, the abstract and universal subject of the rights of man and the rights of the citizen.

Thus there may be detected in the most liberal democrat a tinge of anti-Semitism; he is hostile to the Jew to the extent that the latter thinks of himself as a Jew. He expresses this hostility by a sort of indulgent and amused irony, as when he says of a Jewish friend whose Semitic origin is easily recognizable: “Just the same, he is *too* Jewish.” Or when he declares: “The only thing I have against the Jews is their clannishness; if you let one in, he will bring ten more with him.” During the Occupation the democrat was profoundly and sincerely indignant at the anti-Semitic persecutions, but he sighed from time to time: “The Jews will come back from exile with such insolence and hunger for vengeance that I am afraid of a new outburst of anti-Semitism.” What he really feared was that the persecutions might have helped to give the Jew a more definite consciousness of himself.

The anti-Semite reproaches the Jew with *being* Jewish; the democrat reproaches him

with wilfully *considering himself* a Jew. Between his enemy and his defender, the Jew is in a difficult situation: apparently he can do no more than choose the sauce with which he will be devoured. We must now ask ourselves the question: does the Jew exist? And if he exists, what is he? Is he first a Jew or first a man? Is the solution of the problem to be found in the extermination of all the Israelites or in their total assimilation? Or is it possible to find some other way of stating the problem and of resolving it?

WE ARE in agreement with the anti-Semite on one point: we do not believe in “human nature”; we cannot conceive of society as a sum of isolated molecules; we believe that it is necessary to consider biological, psychical, and social phenomena in a spirit of synthesis. But we take leave of the anti-Semite when it comes to applying this spirit of synthesis. We certainly do not know of any Jewish “principle,” and we are not Manicheans. Neither do we admit that the “true” Frenchman benefits so readily from the experience or the traditions left him by his ancestors; we remain highly sceptical on the subject of psychological heredity, and we are willing to utilize ethnic concepts only in the areas where they have received experimental confirmation—in biology and pathology, for example.

For us, man is defined first of all as a being “in a situation.” That means that he forms a synthetic whole with his situation—biological, economic, political, cultural, etc. He cannot be distinguished from his situation, for it forms him and decides his possibilities; but, inversely, it is he who gives it meaning by making his choices within it and by it. To be in a situation, as we see it, is to *choose oneself* in a situation [to choose to accept one’s own identity beneath the accidents of status, rank, function, etc.—to choose to be oneself.—ED.], and men differ from one another in their situations and also in the choices they themselves make of themselves. What men have in common is not a “nature” but a condition, that is, an ensemble of limits and restrictions: the inevitability of death, the necessity of working for a living, of living in a world already inhabited by other men. Fundamentally this condition is nothing more than the basic

human situation, or, if you prefer, the ensemble of abstract characteristics common to all situations. I agree therefore with the democrat that the Jew is a man like other men, but this tells me nothing in particular—except that he is free, that he is at the same time in bondage, that he is born, enjoys life, suffers, and dies, that he loves and hates, just as do all men. I can derive nothing more from these excessively general data. If I wish to know *who* the Jew is, I must first inquire into the situation surrounding him, since he is a being in a situation. I give warning that I shall limit my description to the Jews in France, for it is the problem of the French Jew that is *our* problem.

I shall not deny that there is a Jewish race. But we must understand each other at once. If by "race" is understood that indefinable complex into which are tossed pell-mell both somatic characteristics and intellectual and moral traits, I believe in it no more than I do in ouija boards. What, for lack of a better term, I shall call ethnic characteristics, are certain inherited physical conformations that one encounters more frequently among Jews than among non-Jews. Here it is still advisable to be prudent: perhaps we had better say Jewish *races*. We know that not all Semites are Jews, which complicates the problem. We also know that certain blond Jews of Russia are still further removed from the woolly-headed Jews of Algeria than from the "Aryans" of East Prussia. As a matter of fact, each country has its Jews and our picture of an Israelite hardly corresponds at all to our neighbors' picture.

When I lived in Berlin at the beginning of the Nazi regime, I had two French friends one of whom was a Jew and one of whom was not. The Jew was of a "marked Semitic type": he had a hooked nose, protruding ears, and thick lips. A Frenchman would have recognized him as a Jew without hesitation. But since he was blond, lean, and phlegmatic, the Germans were completely taken in. He occasionally amused himself by going out with SS men, who did not suspect his race. One of them said to him one day: "I can tell a Jew a hundred yards off." My other friend was a Corsican and a Catholic, the son and grandson of Catholics, but he had hair that was black and a bit curly, a Bourbon nose, a sallow com-

plexion, and he was short and fat. The children in the street threw stones at him and called him "Jude." That was because he closely resembled a certain type of Eastern Jew who is most popular in the German stereotype.

HOWEVER that may be, even admitting that all Jews have certain physical traits in common, it would be rash to conclude from that, unless by the vaguest of analogies, that they must also show the same traits of character. Or better: the physical stigmata which one can observe in the Semite are spatial, therefore juxtaposed and separable. I can on a moment's notice find any one of them in an "Aryan." Am I to conclude, then, that this "Aryan" has such and such a psychic quality which is ordinarily attributed to Jews? Evidently not. But in that case the whole theory crumbles. It presupposes that the Jew is an indivisible totality, whereas we have just shown him to be a mosaic in which each element is a pebble that we can take out and place in another pattern. Thus we can neither deduce the moral from the physical nor postulate a psycho-physiological parallelism. If I am told that I must consider the ensemble of somatic characteristics, I will reply: Either this ensemble is the *sum* of ethnic traits and that sum can in no way represent the spatial equivalent of a psychic *synthesis*—any more than an association of cerebral cells can correspond to a thought—or when we speak of the physical aspect of a Jew, we understand a syncretistic totality that yields to intuition. In this case, to be sure, there may be a *gestalt* in the sense in which Koehler understands the word, and it is to this that the anti-Semites allude when they pretend to "smell a Jew," "have a feel for a Jew," etc., etc. Only, it is impossible to perceive somatic elements apart from the psychic signification which is mingled with them.

Here is a Jew seated on his doorstep in the Rue des Rosiers. I recognize him immediately as a Jew: he has a black and curly beard, a slightly hooked nose, protruding ears, steel-rimmed glasses, a derby pulled down over his eyes, black clothes, quick and nervous gestures, and a smile of strange and dolorous goodness. How am I to disentangle the physical from the moral? His beard is black and curly; that is a somatic character-

istic. But what strikes me above all is that he lets it grow; by that he expresses his attachment to the traditions of the Jewish community; he indicates that he has come from Poland, that he belongs to emigrants of the first generation. Is his son any less a Jew for being clean-shaven? Other traits, like the form of his nose and the position of his ears, are purely anatomical, while others, like the choice of clothing and glasses, expression and mimicry, are purely psychical and social. What is it then that reveals this man to me as an Israelite, if not this inseparable ensemble in which the psychical and the physical, the social, the religious, and the individual are closely mingled, if not this living synthesis that evidently could not be transmitted by heredity and which, at bottom, is identical with his complete personality? We must therefore envisage the hereditary and somatic characteristics of the Jew as one factor among others in his situation, not as a condition determining his nature.

Failing to determine the Jew by his race, shall we define him by his religion or by the existence of a strictly Israelite national community? Here the question becomes complicated. Certainly at a remote time in the past there was a religious and national community that was called Israel. But the history of that community is one of dissolution over a period of twenty-five centuries. First it lost its sovereignty; there was the Babylonian captivity, then the Persian domination, finally the Roman conquest. We must not see in this the effect of a curse—unless there are geographical curses. The situation of Palestine, crossroads for all the commercial routes of the ancient world, and crushed in between mighty empires, is sufficient to explain this slow loss of power. The religious bond was strengthened between the Jews of the dispersion and those who remained on their own soil; it took on the sense and value of a national bond. But this "transfer," it is to be suspected, indicated a spiritualization of collective ties, and spiritualization, after all, means enfeeblement. Shortly after this, moreover, the introduction of Christianity brought division; the appearance of this new religion caused a great crisis in the Israelite world, setting the Jewish emigrants against those remaining in Judea. In contrast to the "strong

form" that Christianity was from the first, the Hebraic religion appeared immediately as a weak form, on the road to disintegration. It managed to maintain itself only by a complicated policy of concessions and obstinacy. It resisted the persecutions and the dispersion of the Jews in the medieval world; it much less effectively resisted the progress of enlightenment and the critical spirit.

The Jews who surround us today have only a ceremonial and polite contact with their religion. I once asked one of them why he had his son circumcised. He replied: "Because it pleased my mother, and because it's the right thing to do." "And why does your mother hold to it?" "Because of her friends and neighbors." I realize that these overly-rational explanations conceal a secret and deep-seated need to attach oneself to tradition and, in default of a national past, to give oneself roots in a past of rites and customs. But that is just the point: religion is here only a symbolic means. At least in Western Europe the Jewish religion has been unable to resist the attacks launched by rationalism and by the Christian spirit; atheistic Jews whom I have questioned admit that their dialogue on the existence of God is carried on against the Christian religion. The religion which they attack and of which they wish to rid themselves is Christianity; their atheism differs in no way from that of a Roger Martin du Gard, who says he has disengaged himself from the Catholic faith. Not for a moment are Jews atheistic against the Talmud; and priest, to all of them, means the vicar, not the rabbi.

THUS the facts of the problem appear as follows: a concrete historical community is basically *national* and *religious*; but the Jewish community, which once was both, has been deprived bit by bit of both these concrete characteristics. We may call it an abstract historical community. Its dispersion implies the breaking up of common traditions, and it was remarked above that its twenty centuries of dispersion and political impotence forbid its having a *historic past*. If it is true, as Hegel says, that a community is historical to the degree that it remembers its history, then the Jewish community is the least historical of all, for it keeps a memory of nothing but a long martyrdom, that is, of a long passivity.

What is it, then, that serves to keep a semblance of unity in the Jewish community? To reply to this question, we must come back to the idea of *situation*. It is neither their past, their religion, nor their soil that unites the sons of Israel. If they have a common bond, if all of them deserve the name of Jew, it is because they have in common the situation of a Jew, that is, they live in a community which takes them for Jews.

In a word, the Jew is perfectly assimilable by modern nations, but he is to be defined as one whom these nations do not wish to assimilate. What weighed upon him originally was that he was the assassin of Christ.* Have we ever stopped to consider the intolerable situation of men condemned to live in a society that adores the God they have killed? Originally, the Jew was therefore a murderer or the son of a murderer—which in the eyes of a community with a pre-logical concept of responsibility amounts inevitably to the same thing—it was as such that he was taboo. It is evident that we cannot find the explanation for modern anti-Semitism here; but if the anti-Semite has chosen the Jew as the object of his hate, it is because of the religious horror that the latter has always inspired.

This horror has had a curious economic effect. If the medieval church tolerated the Jews when she could have assimilated them by force or massacred them, it was because they filled a vital economic function. Accursed, they followed a cursed but indispensable vocation; being unable to own land or serve in the army, they trafficked in money, which a Christian could not undertake without defiling himself. Thus the original curse was soon reinforced by an economic curse, and it is above all the latter that has persisted. Today we reproach the Jews for following unproductive activities, without taking into account the fact that their apparent autonomy within the nation comes from the fact that they were originally forced into these trades by being forbidden all others. Thus it is no exaggeration to say

* We must take note at once that it is a question here of a legend created by Christian propaganda during the dispersion. It is evident that the cross is a *Roman* instrument of torture and that Christ was executed by the *Romans* as a political agitator.

that it is the Christians who have created the Jew in putting an abrupt stop to his assimilation and in providing him, in spite of himself, with a function in which he has since prospered.

Here, too, there is really only a memory; differentiation of economic functions is such today that one cannot assign the Jew a very definite sphere of activity; at most it might be noticed that his long exclusion from certain trades has diverted him from them even when he has had the chance to engage in them. But modern society has seized on this memory and has made it the pretext and the base for its anti-Semitism. Thus, to know what the contemporary Jew is, we must ask the Christian conscience. And we must ask, not "What is a Jew?" but "*What have you made of the Jews?*"

THE Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start. In this sense the democrat is right as against the anti-Semite, for it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew. But it would be wrong to say that the distrust, the curiosity, the disguised hostility the Israelites find around them are no more than the intermittent demonstrations of a few hotheads. Primarily, as we have seen, anti-Semitism is the expression of a primitive society that, though secret and diffused, remains latent in the legal collectivity. We must not suppose, therefore, that a generous outburst of emotion, a few pretty words, a stroke of the pen will suffice to suppress it. That would be like imagining you could abolish war by denouncing its effects in a book.

The Jew no doubt sets a proper value on the sympathy shown him, but it cannot prevent his seeing anti-Semitism as a permanent structure of the community in which he lives. He knows, moreover, that the democrats and all those who defend him have a tendency to treat anti-Semitism rather leniently. First of all, we live in a republic, where all opinions are free. In addition, the myth of national unity still exerts such an influence over the French that they are ready for the greatest compromises in order to avoid internal conflict, especially in periods of international tension—which are, of course, precisely those when anti-Semitism is the most violent. Naive and full of

good
mak
does
of
him
I
wen
men
we
ern
The
extre
done
of a
one's
anti-
who
polit
reali
mira
To
did
to th
mem
or co
rejoic
confl
news
of p
say a
a th
chan
line
must
ever,
ists v
Jews
too r
years
it is
ously
Do
know
unde
Some
we a
man,
race,
that
plain
wisdo
the J
aware
*W

good will, it is inevitably the democrat who makes all the concessions; the anti-Semite doesn't make any. He has the advantage of his anger. People say, "Don't irritate him." They speak softly in his presence.

In 1940, for example, many Frenchmen went over to the side of the Pétain government, which did not fail to preach unity—we know with what reservations. This government initiated anti-Semitic measures. The "Pétainists" did not protest. They felt extremely ill at ease, but what was to be done? If France could be saved at the cost of a few sacrifices, was it not better to close one's eyes? Certainly these people were not anti-Semites; they even spoke to the Jews whom they met with commiseration and politeness. But how could these Jews not realize that they were being sacrificed to the mirage of a united and patriarchal France?

Today* those Jews whom the Germans did not deport or murder are coming back to their homes. Many were among the first members of the Resistance; others had sons or cousins in Leclerc's army. Now all France rejoices and fraternizes in the streets; social conflict seems temporarily forgotten; the newspapers devote whole columns to stories of prisoners of war and deportees. Do we say anything about the Jews? Do we give a thought to those who died in the gas chambers at Lublin? Not a word. Not a line in the newspapers. That is because we must not irritate the anti-Semites; more than ever, we need unity. Well-meaning journalists will tell you: "In the interest of the Jews themselves, it would not do to talk too much about them just now." For four years French society has lived without them; it is just as well not to emphasize too vigorously the fact that they have reappeared.

Does anyone think that the Jews don't know what is happening, that they don't understand the reasons for this silence? Some of them approve, and say: "The less we are noticed, the better." Can a Frenchman, sure of himself, of his religion, of his race, possibly understand the state of mind that dictates such a statement? Is it not plain that to have arrived at this resigned wisdom, at this policy of self-effacement, the Jews must for years have been fully aware of hostility, ugly looks always watch-

ing, indifference always ready to turn into bitterness—this in their own country? Thus they have made a clandestine return, and their joy at being liberated is not part of the nation's joy. The following little anecdote will serve to show what they have suffered on this account. In my *Lettres Françaises* without thinking about it particularly, and simply for the sake of completeness, I wrote something or other about the sufferings of the prisoners of war, the deportees, the political prisoners, and the Jews. Several Jews thanked me in a most touching manner. How completely must they have felt themselves abandoned, to think of thanking an author for merely having written the word "Jew" in an article!

Thus the Jew is in the situation of a Jew because he lives in the midst of a society that takes him for a Jew. He has passionate enemies, and defenders lacking in passion. The democrat professes moderation; he blames or admonishes while synagogues are being set on fire. He is tolerant by profession; he is, indeed, snobbish about tolerance and even extends it to the enemies of democracy. Wasn't it the style among radicals of the left to consider Maurras a genius? How can the democrat fail to understand the anti-Semite! It is as if he were fascinated by all who plot his downfall. Perhaps at the bottom of his heart he yearns after the violence which he has denied himself.

In any case, the struggle is not equal. If the democrat were to put some warmth into pleading the cause of the Jew, he would have to be a Manichean too, and equate the Jew with the principle of the Good. But how could he do this? The democrat is not a fool. He makes himself the advocate of the Jew because he sees him as a member of humanity; since humanity has other members whom he must also defend, the democrat has much to do; he concerns himself with the Jew when he has time. But the anti-Semite has only one enemy, and he can think of him all the time. Thus it is he who calls the turn. Vigorously attacked, feebly defended, the Jew feels himself in danger in a society in which anti-Semitism is the continual temptation. This is what we must look at more closely.

The French Jews are for the most part members of the lower or upper middle class.

* Written in October 1944.

In general, they follow vocations I shall call vocations of opinion, in the sense that success depends not on their skill in working with materials but in the opinion that other men have of them. Whether a man is a lawyer or a haberdasher, his clientele comes if he is pleasing. It follows that the vocations of which we are speaking are full of ceremonies; it is necessary to seduce, to captivate, and to retain confidence. Correctness of costume, apparent severity of conduct, honor, all are based on these ceremonies, on the thousand little dance steps it is necessary to take in order to attract a customer. Thus what counts above all else is reputation. A man *makes* himself a reputation, he lives on it; that means that basically he is completely dependent on other men, whereas the peasant has primarily to do with his land, the worker with his materials and tools.

The Jew thus finds himself in a paradoxical situation: it is perfectly all right for him to gain a reputation for honesty, just as others do and in the same ways, but this reputation is added to a primary reputation—that of being a Jew—which has been imposed on him at one stroke and from which he cannot free himself no matter what he may do. The Jewish workman in the mine, in the foundry, at the wheel of a truck, can forget that he is a Jew; the Jewish businessman cannot forget it. Let him multiply acts of disinterestedness and honesty, and perhaps he will be called a *good Jew*. But Jew he is and must remain.

At least when he is called honest or dishonest, he knows what it is about; he remembers the acts that justify these terms. When he is called Jew, it is quite otherwise; then it is a question not of a particular condition but of a certain tone expressed in all his actions. He has heard repeatedly that a Jew thinks like a Jew, sleeps, drinks, eats like a Jew, is honest or dishonest in a Jewish manner. And the Jew looks for this Jewishness in vain. Is any of us conscious of his style of behavior? Can any of us look at himself from the outside?

Yet this little word "Jew" appears in his life one fine day and will never leave again. Some children by the time they are six have already had fights with schoolmates who call them "Yids." Others may remain in ignorance for a long time. A young Jewish

girl in a family I am acquainted with did not even know the meaning of the word Jew until she was fifteen. During the Occupation there was a Jewish doctor who lived shut up in his home at Fontainebleau and raised his children without saying a word to them of their origin. But however it comes about, some day they must learn the truth: sometimes from the smiles of those who surround them, sometimes from rumor or insult. The later the discovery, the more violent the shock. Suddenly they perceive that others know something about them that they don't know, that people apply to them an ugly and upsetting term that is not used in their own family. They feel themselves separated, cut off from the society of the normal children who run and play tranquilly and securely around them—those lucky children who have no *special name*. And they return home, they look at their father, they think: "Is he a Jew too?" How can they fail to keep the marks of this first revelation all their lives? There have been hundreds of descriptions of the disturbances which occur in a child when he suddenly discovers that his parents have sexual relations. But what must happen to the little Jew when he steals a glance at his parents and thinks: "They are Jews"?

At home, he is told that he should be proud of being a Jew. And he no longer knows what to believe; he is torn between humiliation, anguish, and pride. He feels that he is set apart, but he still does not understand what sets him apart; he is sure of only one thing: no matter what he does, he is and will remain a Jew.

WE HAVE been indignant, and rightly, over the obscene "yellow star" that the German government forced upon the Jews. What seemed intolerable about this was that it called attention to the Jew, that it obliged him to feel himself perpetually Jewish in the eyes of others. There were some who tried by all possible means to indicate their sympathy for the unfortunates so marked. But when very well-intentioned people undertook to raise their hats to Jews whom they encountered, the Jews themselves felt that these salutes were extremely painful. Under the looks of support and compassion, they felt themselves becoming *objects*: objects of commiseration, of pity,

of what you will—but objects. They provided these virtuous liberals with an occasion for making a general gesture, for uttering a manifesto. They were only an occasion.

The liberal, when he met a Jew, was free, completely free to shake his hand or spit in his face; he could decide in accordance with his morality, with the way he had chosen to be; but the Jew was not free to be a Jew. Thus the strongest souls among the Jews preferred the gesture of hate to the gesture of charity, because hate is a passion and seems less free, whereas charity manifests itself from above to those below. In the end we came to understand all this so well that we turned our eyes away when we met a Jew wearing a star. We were ill at ease, embarrassed by our own glance, which, if it fell upon him, made him a Jew in spite of himself and in spite of ourselves. The supreme expression of sympathy and of friendship lay here in appearing to ignore, for whatever effort we made to reach to the person, it was always the Jew whom we encountered.

Yet the Nazi ordinances only carried to its extreme a situation to which we had formerly accommodated ourselves very well. Before the armistice, to be sure, the Jew did not wear a star. But his name, his face, his gestures, and a thousand other traits designated him as a Jew; walking in the streets, entering a café, a store, a drawing room, he knew himself *marked* as a Jew. If someone approached him with a manner a little too open and too friendly, he knew at once that he had become the object of a demonstration of tolerance, that his interlocutor had chosen him as a pretext for declaring to the world, and to himself: "Look at me, I have liberal ideas, I am not an anti-Semite, I know only individuals, not races."

But within himself, the Jew considers himself the same as others. He speaks the same language; he has the same class interests, the same national interests; he reads the newspapers that the others read, he votes as they do, he understands and shares their opinions. Yet they give him to understand that he does not belong, that he has a "Jewish way" of speaking, of reading, of voting. And if he asks for an explanation, they sketch a portrait in which he does not recognize himself. There can be no doubt of its

being his portrait, since millions of people maintain that it is. What can he do? We shall see later on that the root of Jewish disquietude is the necessity imposed upon the Jew of subjecting himself to endless self-examination and finally of assuming a phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself—himself as others see him. You may say that this is the lot of all, that each of us has a character familiar to those close to us which we ourselves do not see. No doubt: this is the expression of our fundamental relation to the Other. But the Jew has a personality like the rest of us, and on top of that he is Jewish. It amounts in a sense to a doubling of the fundamental relationship with the Other. The Jew is over-determined.

WHAT, in his eyes, makes his situation even more incomprehensible is that he has the full enjoyment of his rights as a citizen, at least so long as the society in which he lives is in equilibrium. In periods of crisis and of persecution, he is a hundred times more unhappy, but at least he can revolt, and, by a dialectic analogous to that which Hegel describes in his *Master and Slave*, he can regain his liberty by opposing oppression and denying his accursed "Jewish nature" in armed resistance against those who wish to impose it on him.

But when all is calm, against whom is he to revolt? He accepts the society around him, he joins the game and he conforms to all the ceremonies, dancing with the others the dance of respectability. Besides, he is nobody's slave; he is a free citizen under a regime that allows free competition; he is forbidden no social dignity, no office of the state. He may be decorated with the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, he may become a great lawyer or a cabinet minister. But at the very moment when he reaches the summits of legal society, another society—amorphous, diffused, and omnipresent—appears before him as if in brief flashes of lightning and refuses to take him in. How sharply must he feel the vanity of honors and of fortune, when the greatest success will never gain him entrance into that society which considers itself the "real" one. As a cabinet minister, he will be a Jewish cabinet minister, at once an "Excellency" and an untouch-

able. And yet he never encounters any particular resistance; people seem, rather, to be in flight before him; an impalpable chasm widens out, and, above all, an invisible chemistry devaluates all that he touches.

In a bourgeois society it is the constant movement of people, the collective currents, the styles, the customs, all these things, that in effect create *values*. The values of poems, of furniture, of houses, of landscapes derive in large part from the spontaneous condensations that fall on these objects like a light dew; they are strictly national and result from the normal functioning of a traditionalist and historical society. To be a Frenchman is not merely to have been born in France, to vote and pay taxes; it is above all to have the use and the sense of these values. And when a man shares in their creation, he is in some degree reassured about himself; he has a justification for existence through a sort of adhesion to the whole of society. To know how to appreciate a piece of Louis Seize furniture, the delicacy of a saying by Chamfort, a landscape of the Île de France, a painting by Claude Lorrain, is to affirm and to feel that one belongs to French society; it is to renew a tacit social contract with all the members of that society. At one stroke the vague contingency of our existence vanishes and gives way to the necessity of an existence by right. Every Frenchman who is moved by reading Villon or by looking at the Palace of Versailles becomes a public functionary and the subject of imprescriptible rights.

Now a Jew is a man who is refused access to these values on principle. No doubt the worker is in the same predicament, but his situation is different. He can disdainfully reject the values and the culture of the middle class; he can dream of substituting his own. The Jew, in theory, belongs to the very class of people who reject him; he shares their tastes and their way of life. He *touches* these values but he does not see them; they should be his and they are refused him. He is told that he is blind. Naturally that is false. Are we to believe that Bloch, Crémieux, Suarès, Schwob, Benda understand the great French masterpieces less well than a Christian grocer or a Christian policeman? Are we to believe that Max Jacob was less competent to handle our language than an "Aryan" municipal

clerk? And Proust, a half-Jew, did he understand Racine only half-way? As between the "Aryan" Chuquet, celebrated for his bad style, and the Jew Léon Blum, which one has understood Stendhal the better?

But it is of no importance that this is an erroneous notion; the fact is that it is a group error. The Jew must decide for himself whether it is true or false; indeed he must prove it. And yet people will always reject the proof which he furnishes. He may go as far as he wants in understanding a work of art, a custom, a period, a style. What constitutes the *true* value of the object considered, a value accessible only to Frenchmen of the "real" France, is exactly that which is "beyond" and which cannot be expressed in words. In vain may he argue about his culture, his accomplishments; it is a Jewish culture; they are Jewish accomplishments. He is a Jew precisely in that he does not even suspect what ought to be understood. Thus an attempt is made to persuade him that the true sense of things must always escape him; there is formed around him an impalpable atmosphere, which is the *genuine* France, with its *genuine* values, its *genuine* tact, its *genuine* morality, and he has no part in it.

He can, indeed, acquire all the goods he wants, lands and castles if he has the wherewithal; but at the very moment when he becomes a legal proprietor, the property undergoes a subtle change in meaning and value. Only a Frenchman, the son of a Frenchman, son or grandson of a peasant, is capable of possessing it really. To own a hut in a village, it is not enough to have bought it with hard cash. One must know all the neighbors, their parents and grandparents, the surrounding farms, the beeches and oaks of the forest; one must know how to work, fish, hunt; one must have made notches in the trees in childhood and have found them enlarged in ripe old age. You may be sure that the Jew does not fulfill these conditions. For that matter, perhaps the Frenchman doesn't either, but he is granted a certain indulgence. There is a French way and a Jewish way of confusing oats and wheat.

THUS the Jew remains the stranger, the intruder, the unassimilated at the very heart of our society. Everything is accessible

to him, and yet he possesses nothing; for, he is told, what one possesses is not to be bought. All that he touches, all that he acquires becomes devaluated in his hands; the goods of the earth, the true goods, are always those which he has not. He is well aware that he has contributed as much as another to forging the future of the society that rejects him. But if the future is to be his, at least he is refused the past. If he turns toward the past, he sees that his race has no part in it. Call the roll of the kings of France, their ministers, their great captains, the artists, the men of learning—none were Jews. And Jews did not bring about the French Revolution.

The reason for all this is simple. Until the 19th century the Jews, like women, were in a state of tutelage; thus their contribution to political and social life, like that of women, is of recent date. The names of Einstein, of Bergson, of Chagall, of Kafka are enough to show what they would have been able to bring to the world if they had been emancipated earlier. But that is of no importance; the fact is there. These are Frenchmen who have no part in the history of France. Their collective memory furnishes them only with obscure recollections of pogroms, of ghettos, of exoduses, of great monotonous sufferings, twenty centuries of repetition, not of evolution. The Jew is not yet *historical*, and yet he is the most ancient of peoples, or nearly so. That is what gives him the air of being perpetually aged and yet always young: he has wisdom and no history. "Pay no attention to that," you will say. "We have only to welcome him without reserve; our history will be his history, or at least his son's." But that is what we take care not to do. Thus he floats on, uncertain, uprooted.

Moreover, let him not turn back toward Israel to find a community and a past to compensate for those which are refused him. That Jewish community which is based neither on nation, land, religion—at least not in contemporary France—nor material interest, but only on an identity of situation, might indeed be a true *spiritual* bond of affection, of culture, and of mutual aid. But the Jew's enemies will immediately say that this bond is ethnic, and he himself, at a loss how to designate it, will perhaps use the word *race*. Then at one stroke he has justi-

fied the anti-Semite: "You see very well that there is a Jewish *race*; they recognize it themselves, and besides they crowd together everywhere." And, in fact, if the Jews want to draw a legitimate pride from this community, they must indeed end up by exalting racial qualities, since they cannot take pride in any collective work that is specifically Jewish, or in a civilization properly Jewish, or in a common mysticism.

Thus the anti-Semite wins on all counts. In a word, the Jew, an intruder into French society, is compelled to remain isolated. If he does not consent, he is insulted. But if he consents, he is no more readily assimilated on that account; he is tolerated—and always with a distrust that drives him on each occasion to "prove himself."

IN CASE of war or civil disturbance, the "true" Frenchman has no proofs to make; he simply fulfills his military or civil obligations. But it is not the same for the Jew. He may be sure that people are going to make a strict count of the number of Jews in the army. Thus he suddenly finds himself answerable for all his coreligionists. Even if he has passed the military age, he is going to feel the necessity of enlisting—whether he does anything about it or not—because people are pretending everywhere that Jews are slackers. A rumor not without foundation, some may say. Not at all. In an analysis of a Jewish complex made by Stekel, of which I will have more to say later, I read this passage: "The Christians said"—it was an Austrian Jewess speaking—"that the Jews always try to get out from under as much as they can. Then my husband wanted to volunteer." Now this referred to the beginning of the war of 1914, and Austria had had no war since that of 1866, which was carried on with a professional army. This slander upon the Austrian Jews, which has been spread in France also, is simply the spontaneous fruit of distrust of the Jew.

In 1938, at the time of the international crisis that was resolved at Munich, the French government called up only certain categories of the reserve. The majority of the men able to bear arms were not yet mobilized. Already, however, stones were being thrown through the store windows of one of my friends, a Jewish merchant at

Belleville, on the grounds that he was a slacker. Thus the Jew, if he is to be left in peace, should be mobilized ahead of other people; in case of famine, he should be hungrier than others; if a general disaster strikes the country, he should be the one whom it hits hardest.

This perpetual obligation to prove that he is French puts the Jew in a situation of guilt. If on every occasion he does not do more than everybody else, much more than anybody else, he is guilty, he is a dirty Jew—and one might say, parodying the words of Beaumarchais: To judge by the qualities we demand of a Jew if he is to be assimilated as a “true” Frenchman, how many Frenchmen would be found worthy of being Jews in their own country?

SINCE the Jew is dependent upon opinion for his profession, his rights, and his life, his situation is completely unstable. Legally not open to attack, he is at the mercy of the whims and passions of the “real” society. He carefully watches the progress of anti-Semitism; he tries to foresee crises and gauge trends in the same way that the peasant keeps watch on the weather and predicts storms. He ceaselessly calculates the effects that external events will have on his own position. He may accumulate legal guarantees, riches, honors; he is only the more vulnerable on that account, and he knows it. Thus it seems to him at one and the same time that his efforts are always crowned with success—for he knows the astonishing successes of his race—and that a curse has made them empty, for he will never acquire the security enjoyed by the most humble Christian.

This is perhaps one of the meanings of *The Trial* by the Jew, Kafka. Like the hero of that novel, the Jew is engaged in a long trial. He does not know his judges, scarcely even his lawyers; he does not know what he is charged with, yet he knows that he is considered guilty; judgment is continually put off—for a week, two weeks—he takes advantage of these delays to improve his position in a thousand ways, but every precaution taken at random pushes him a little deeper into guilt. His external situation may appear brilliant, but the interminable

trial invisibly wastes him away, and it happens sometimes, as in the novel, that men seize him, carry him off on the pretense that he has lost his case, and murder him in some vague area of the suburbs.

The anti-Semites are right in saying that the Jew eats, drinks, reads, sleeps, and dies like a Jew. What else could he do? They have subtly poisoned his food, his sleep, and even his death. How else could it be for him, subjected every moment to this poisoning? As soon as he steps outside, as soon as he encounters others, in the street or in public places, as soon as he feels upon him the look of those whom a Jewish newspaper calls “Them”—a look that is a mixture of fear, disdain, reproach, and brotherly love—he must decide: does he or does he not consent to be the person whose role they make him play? And if he consents, to what extent? If he refuses, will he refuse all kinship with other Israelites, or only an ethnic relationship?

Whatever he does, his course has been set for him. He can choose to be courageous or cowardly, sad or gay; he can choose to kill Christians or to love them; but he cannot choose not to be a Jew. Or, rather, if he does so choose, if he declares that Jews do not exist, if he denies with violence and desperation the Jewish character in himself, it is precisely in this that he is a Jew. I who am not a Jew, I have nothing to deny, nothing to prove; but if the Jew has decided that his race does not exist, it is up to him to prove it. To be a Jew is to be thrown into—to be *abandoned to*—the situation of a Jew; and at the same time it is to be responsible in and through one's own person for the destiny and the very nature of the Jewish people. For, whatever the Jew says or does, and whether he have a clear or vague conception of his responsibilities, it is as if all his acts were subject to a Kantian imperative, as if he had to ask himself before each act: “If all Jews acted as I am going to do, what would happen to Jewish life?” And to the questions he asks himself (what would happen if all the Jews were Zionists, or if, on the contrary, they were all converted to Christianity? If all Jews denied they were Jews? etc.), he must make reply, alone and unaided, by choosing himself.